THE JEW

STENDHAL

" I WAS then a very handsome man."

" But you are still remarkably striking."

" With what a difference! I am forty-five. Then I was only thirty. It was in 1814. All I had were an uncommon figure and a rare beauty. For the rest I was a Jew, despised by you Christians, and by Jews as well. For I had been for a long time excessively poor."

" Men are very wrong in despising——"

" Don't put yourself to the cost of finding pretty phrases. This evening I feel disposed to talk, and when I do talk I am sincere. Our ship is going well; the breeze is delightful; to-morrow morning we shall be in Venice. . . . But to come back to the story of the curse about which we were speaking, and of my travels in France in 1814. I was very fond of money in 1814. It is the only passion I have ever known in myself.

" I spent my days in the streets of Venice with a little box, on the top of which some golden jewels were displayed; but in a secret drawer I had cotton stockings, handkerchiefs, and other contraband English goods. One of my uncles, after the burial of my father, said to each of us—we were three—that there remained a capital only of five francs. This good uncle gave me a napoleon—twenty francs. In the night my mother decamped with twenty-one francs; that left me only four francs. I stole from one of the neighbours a violin-case I knew she had put in the garret. I went and bought eight handkerchiefs of red cotton. They cost me ten sous; I sold them for eleven. The first day I sold out all my stock four times. I hawked my handkerchiefs among the sailors by the arsenal. The merchant, astonished by my activity, asked me why I did not buy my goods by the dozen. It was a good half a league from his shop to the arsenal. I told him I only had four francs in the world, that my mother had stolen twenty-one francs from me. He gave me a very hard kick that lifted me out of the shop.

" Still, the next day I was back again. I had already sold the eight handkerchiefs the evening before. As it was a warm night I slept out of doors. I had lived, I had drunk Chio wine, and I had saved five sous out of my trade. That was the life I led from 1800 to 1814. I seemed to work under the blessing of God."

The Jew uncovered himself with a tender air.

"I was so good at the trade that several times I doubled my capital in a single day. Often I took a gondola and went to sell stockings to sailors on the ships. But, as soon as I had put by a little money, my mother and my sister found a pretext for making friends with me again, and robbing me. Once they took me to a jeweller's shop, put on a necklace and earrings, and went out, as for a moment, and never came back. The jeweller wanted fifty francs from me. I began to weep. I had only fourteen francs on me. I told him where my box was. He sent for it; but, while I was wasting time at the jeweller's, my mother had also gone off with the box. The jeweller gave me a good thrashing.

"When he was tired of beating me, I explained to him that if he would give me back my fourteen francs and lend me a little table drawer, in which I could fix a double bottom, I could certainly pay him back ten sous a day. And this is what I did. The jeweller ended by trusting me with earrings worth twenty francs; but he never allowed me to gain more than five sous on each piece.

"In 1805 I had a capital of a thousand francs. Then I considered that our law orders us to marry, and I thought of accomplishing my duty. I had the misfortune to fall in love with a Jewish girl named Stella. She had two brothers; one of them was quartermaster-sergeant among the French troops, and the other cashier at the paymaster's. They often pushed her at night out of the room they occupied in common, on the ground-floor on the side of San Paolo. I found her there one evening, weeping. Mistaking what she was, I offered to buy her ten sous' worth of Chio wine. Her tears increased. Telling her she was a fool, I walked on.

"But she struck me as very pretty. Next night, at the same hour—ten—my sales in Saint Mark's Place were finished, and I passed by the spot where I had met her. She was not there. Three days afterwards I was luckier. I had a long talk with her. She refused me with horror.

"'She has seen me go by with my box filled with jewels,' I thought. 'She wants me to make her a present of one of my necklaces, and that's what I won't do!'

"I resolved not to take the street any more. But in spite of myself, and almost without admitting it, I gave up drinking wine, and each day I set apart the money I thus saved. I was still more foolish not to use this money in trade. In that time, sir, I tripled my capital every week.

"When I had saved twelve francs—the price of my cheapest necklaces—I went several times down the street where Stella lived. At last I saw her. She rejected my gallant advances with indignation. In our talk I told her I had stopped drinking wine for three months to save the cost of one of my necklaces and offer it to her.

She did not reply, but asked my advice on a misfortune that had happened to her since she last saw me.

" Her brothers worked together at clipping any golden coins they could procure. (They plunged the sequins and napoleons in a bath of *aqua fortis*.) The quartermaster-sergeant had been put in prison ; and for fear of rousing suspicions, the cashier at the paymaster's would not take any steps to help him. Stella did not ask me to go to the citadel ; and for my part I never mentioned the place, but I begged her to wait for me the next evening. . . ."

" But we are still very far," I said, " from the curse that overcame you in France."

" You are right," said the Jew, " but I promise to finish in a few words the story of my marriage, or be silent. I don't know why I like to talk to-day of Stella.

" At some trouble, I got the quartermaster brother out of prison. They gave me the hand of their sister, and brought their father to Venice—a poor Jew of Innsbruck. I had rented some rooms, happily paid in advance, and had collected some bits of furniture there. My father-in-law went among all his relatives in the city announcing he was marrying his daughter. At last, after a year of anxieties, on the eve of the marriage, he made off with six hundred francs he had collected from his relatives. We were going, his daughter and he and I, to eat a salad at Murano. That was when he disappeared. Meanwhile, my two brothers-in-law stole every bit of the furniture in my room, and unfortunately the stuff was not all paid for.

" My credit was ruined. My brothers-in-law, whom folks had always seen with me, had told the merchants with whom I dealt that I was at Chiozzia, where I was selling anything I wanted. In a word, by all kinds of trickeries, they had stolen more than two hundred francs. I saw it was necessary to fly from Venice. I placed Stella as nursemaid with the jeweller who had trusted me with the necklaces. Early the next morning, having given Stella twenty francs, keeping only six myself, I fled.

" Never had I been so ruined. For I now seemed a thief. Happily, in my despair, I had the idea, on reaching Padua, to write the truth to the merchants of Venice from whom my wife's brothers had taken the goods. I learned next day there was an order out for my arrest, and the police of the kingdom of Italy were not to be trifled with.

" A famous lawyer of Padua had become blind. He wanted a valet to lead him about, but his misfortune made him so ill-tempered that he never kept a man more than a month. But I wagered with myself that I would not be driven out of his house. I entered his service, and the next day, as he was bored that nobody came to see him, I told him my story.

" ' If you do not protect me,' I said, ' I shall be arrested one of these days.'

" ' Arrest one of my servants ! ' he exclaimed, ' I should soon stop that ! '

" At last, sir, I won his favour. He went to bed early, and I obtained permission to do a little trade in the cafés of Padua, from eight o'clock, when he went to bed, to two o'clock in the morning, when the rich people left the cafés.

" I made two hundred francs in eighteen months. I asked to go. He told me that in his will he was leaving me a considerable sum of money, but that I must never leave his house.

" ' In that case,' I thought, ' why did you let me trade ? '

" I decamped. I paid my creditors at Venice. This brought me much honour. I married Stella. I taught her to trade. Now she can sell better than I can. At last I come to the story of my travels, and after that to the curse.

" I had more than a hundred louis capital. I must tell you the story of a new reconciliation with my mother, who stole from me again, and then got my sister to rob me. So I left Venice, seeing that, as long as I was there, I should be the dupe of my family. I settled at Zara, where I got on wonderfully. A Croatian captain, whom I had furnished with part of the clothes of his regiment, said to me one day :

" ' Filippo ! do you want to make a fortune ? We are going to France. Learn one thing ; that is, without seeming to be, I am the friend of Baron Bradal, the colonel of the regiment. Come with us as sutler. You will earn a good deal. But this business will only be a pretext. The colonel, with whom I seem to be on bad terms, has given me all the provisioning of the regiment. I want an intelligent man. You will suit me.'

" Now, you see, sir, I did not love my wife any more."

" What ! Poor Stella, to whom you had been so faithful ? "

" The fact is, sir, I loved nothing but money. Ah, I was very fond of that ! "

I began to laugh ; there was such true passion in his exclamation.

" I was made sutler to the regiment. I left Zara. After a march of forty-eight days we reached the Simplon. The five hundred francs I had brought with me had become already fifteen hundred francs, and besides I had a pretty covered cart and two horses. At the Simplon our sufferings began. I almost lost my life. I spent more than twenty-two nights sleeping in the open air in the cold."

" Ah," I said, " you were compelled to bivouac ! "

" I made each day fifty to sixty francs, but every night I was in danger of being frozen. At last the army got over the frightful mountain, and we arrived at Lausanne. There I entered into partnership with Monsieur Perrin. Ah, the worthy man ! He was

a brandy merchant. I knew how to sell in six different languages, while he was good at buying. Ah, the excellent man! Only he was too violent. When a Cossack would not pay for his drink, if he was alone in the shop, Perrin thrashed him till he bled.

"'But my friend,' I used to say to him, 'we are making a hundred francs a day. What does it matter if a drunkard does us out of a couple of francs?'

"'I cannot help it,' he answered; 'I do not like Cossacks.'

"'You will get us murdered. Then, Monsieur Perrin, it will be better to end our partnership.'

"The French vivandiers would not venture in our camp, for no one paid them. We did splendid business. On reaching Lyons we had fourteen thousand francs in our coffers. There, out of pity for the poor French merchants, I went in for smuggling. There was a great deal of tobacco outside Saint Clair gate. They came and begged me to get it into the town. I told them to be patient for a couple of days, until my friend the colonel was in command. Then for five days I filled my covered cart with tobacco. The Frenchmen at the gate grumbled, but did not dare to arrest me. On the fifth day, one of them, who was drunk, attacked me. I whipped on my horse, but the others stopped me. I was bleeding all over, and demanded I should be led before the commander of the guard. He belonged to our regiment, but would not recognise me, and sent me to prison. While going to prison I gave two crowns to my escort to lead me before my colonel. In the presence of the soldiers he treated me very harshly and threatened to hang me. As soon as we were alone he said:

"'Cheer up! to-morrow I will put another officer at the gate. Instead of one cart, bring in two.'

"But I would not. I gave him two hundred sequins.

"'What!' he said to me, 'do you take such a lot of trouble for nothing?"

"'I am sorry for the poor merchants,' I replied.

"Our affairs—Perrin's and mine—went admirably as far as Dijon. There, sir, in one night we lost more than twelve thousand francs. The sales had been splendid. It was a grand review, and we were the only vivandiers. We had a net gain of more than a thousand francs. At midnight, when everybody was sleeping, a cursed Croatian would not pay up. Perrin, seeing he was alone, overwhelmed him with blows, and covered him with blood.

"'You are mad,' I said. 'It is true this man has drunk six francs' worth; but if he has the strength to use his voice there will be a row.'

"The Croatian tumbled like a dead man out of our shop, but he was only stupefied. He began to shout. Some soldiers, bivouacking close by, came up, and, finding him covered with blood, broke in

our door. Perrin tried to defend himself, and got eight sabre wounds.

" ' I am not guilty,' I said to the soldiers. ' He did it. Take me to your colonel ! '

" ' We will not wake the colonel for you,' said one of the soldiers.

" In spite of my efforts, our unhappy shop was attacked by some thousands of soldiers. The officers outside the mob could not get through and use their authority. I thought that Perrin was dead : I was in a pitiable condition myself. At last, sir, they pillaged us of more than twelve hundred francs' worth of wine and brandy.

" At daybreak, I succeeded in escaping. My colonel gave me four men to rescue Perrin if he were still alive. I found him in a guard-room, and took him to a surgeon.

" ' We must separate, my friend,' I said. ' You will end in getting me killed.'

" But he insisted so much, that we started a second partnership, paying some soldiers to guard our shop. In two months we made twelve thousand francs each. Unhappily, Perrin killed in a duel one of the soldiers who were guarding us.

" ' You will get me killed,' I repeated, and I left him.

" I went to Lyons, where I bought watches and diamonds, which were then cheap. For I am well up in all sorts of business. If you dropped me into any country, with fifty francs in my pocket, in six months I would have lived well and tripled my capital. I hid my diamonds in a secret place I made in my cart. The regiment having left for Valence and Avignon, I followed it after staying three days in Lyons.

" But, sir, when I got to Valence at eight in the evening, it was raining and dark. I knocked at the door of an inn. I was told there was no room for a Cossack. I knocked again. They flung stones at me from the upper window.

" ' It is clear,' I said to myself, ' I shall die to-night in this accursed town.'

" No one would answer : and no one would act as guide. I saw that if I did not want to die, I should have to sacrifice some of my goods. I gave a glass of brandy to the sentry. He was a Hungarian. Hearing me speak his language, he took pity on me, and told me to wait until he was relieved. I was perishing with cold : at last his relief came. I treated the corporal and all the men, and they led me to the commander. Ah, what a gentleman, sir ! He called me in at once. I explained to him that, out of hatred to the king, no inn-keeper would give me a night's lodging for any money.

" ' Very well,' he cried, ' they shall lodge you for nothing.'

" He gave me a fine billet for two nights, and four men were told off to accompany me. I returned to the inn, where they had thrown stones at me. I knocked twice. I said, in French, I had four men

with me, and we would break in the door if it were not opened. No answer. We found a great piece of wood and began to break down the door. It was half broken through when a man opened it angrily. He was a tall fellow—six feet high—with a sabre in one hand and a candle in the other. I thought there was going to be a row and my cart would be pillaged. So, though I had a lodging billet, I cried:

"'I will pay in advance, sir, if you like.'

"'Ah, it is you, Filippo!' cried the man, lowering his sabre and embracing me. 'What: don't you remember Bonnard, corporal of the twentieth regiment?'

"I embraced him in turn, and sent the soldiers away. Bonnard had lodged with my father for six months at Vicenza.

"'I am dying of hunger,' I said. 'For three days I have been wandering about Valence.'

"'I will awaken my servant and soon get you a good supper.'

"He embraced me again, and was never tired of looking at me and questioning me. I went with him to the cellar, from which he brought an excellent wine that he kept in sand. As we were drinking while waiting for supper, a tall handsome girl of eighteen came in.

"'Ah, you have got up!' said Bonnard. 'So much the better. Friend, this is my sister! You must marry her! You are a nice boy, and I will give her a dowry of six hundred francs.

"'I am married already,' I said to him. 'I have a wife at Zara, where she is in business.'

"'Let her go to the devil, with her business. Settle yourself in France—and marry the prettiest girl in the town.'

"Catherine was really very pretty. She looked at me in wonder.

"'You are an officer?' she said, deceived by a fine pelisse bought at the review at Dijon.

"'No, mademoiselle, I am a vivandier to the army, and I have made two hundred louis. I assure you there are not many of our officers with that money.' I had more than six hundred louis, but I am always very prudent.

"At last, will you believe it, sir? Bonnard would not let me go any farther. He rented for me a little shop by the side of the guard-room, near the gate, where I did business with our soldiers. And though I did not follow the army any longer, there were days when I still made my ten francs. Bonnard was always saying to me: 'You must marry my sister.' Little by little Catherine got into the habit of coming to my little shop, and spending three or four hours there. At last, sir, I got madly in love with her. She was still more in love with me. But by God's grace we did not lose our senses.

"'How can you want me to marry you?' I said to her. 'I am married.'

"'Haven't you left your Italian wife all your stock? Let her

live on it at Zara, and you stay with us. Go into partnership with my brother, or keep your own business on. You are doing well and you will still do better.'

"I must tell you, sir, I was going in for banking business at Valence, and by buying good bills on Lyons, signed by men whom Bonnard knew, I sometimes made a hundred or a hundred and twenty francs a week in this way alone. So I remained in Valence until the autumn. I did not know what to do. I was dying to marry Catherine, and I had given her a dress and a hat from Lyons. When we went out walking together, her brother, she and I, everybody had their eyes on Catherine. She was really the most beautiful girl I have seen in my life.

"'If you will not marry me,' she would often say, 'I will be your servant. Only you must never leave me.'

"She went ahead of me to my shop, to save me the trouble of opening it. At last, sir, I was absolutely mad in love with her, and she was the same as regards me, but we were always good. At the end of autumn the allies left Valence.

"'The inn-keepers of this town might murder me,' I said to Bonnard. 'They know I have made some money here.'

"'Go if you will,' said Bonnard with a sigh. 'We will not force anybody. But if you will stay and marry my sister, I will give her half of my property, and if any one says anything about you, leave him to me.'

"Three times I put off the day of my departure. The last troops of the rear-guard were already at Lyons when I resolved to go. We spent the night weeping, Catherine, her brother, and myself. You see, sir, I lost my happiness by not remaining with this family. God would not permit me to be happy!

"At last I set off, the 7th of November 1814. I shall never forget that day. I could not guide my cart. I was obliged to engage a driver half-way between Valence and Vienne. The day after my departure, as I was harnessing my horse at Vienne, who should arrive at the inn?—Catherine! She at once folded me in her arms. She was known in the inn, and she pretended to have come to see an aunt of hers in the town.

"'I want to go with you as your servant,' she repeated, the tears rolling down her face. 'If you will not take me, I will throw myself in the Rhône.'

"All the people in the inn gathered round us. Catherine, who was as a rule so reserved and never said anything, talked and wept without restraint, and kissed me before them all. I got her quickly on my cart and drove away. A quarter of a league from the town I stopped.

"'Here we must say good-bye,' I said to her.

"She never spoke, and clutched her head in her hands with

convulsive movements. I was afraid. I saw she would throw herself in the river, if I sent her back.

" ' But I am married,' I repeated to her. ' Married before God,' I said.

" ' I know it quite well. I will be your servant.'

" Ten times I stopped my cart between Vienne and Lyons : but she would not consent to leave me.

" ' If I pass the bridge of the Rhône with her,' I said to myself, ' it will be the sign of the will of God.'

" At last, sir, without noticing it, I passed the bridge and reached Lyons. At the inn they took us for husband and wife, and gave us a single room. I started to trade in watches and diamonds, and made ten francs a day ; and, thanks to the admirable housekeeping of Catherine, we lived on less than four. I took some rooms, which we furnished very well. I then possessed thirteen thousand francs, which in the banking business brought me in about eighteen hundred francs. Never have I been so rich as in the year and a half spent with Catherine. I was so rich that I bought a little pleasure-carriage, and every Sunday we went for excursions outside the town.

" A Jew of my acquaintance came to see me one day, and got me to take him in my carriage some way from Lyons. There he said suddenly to me :

" ' Filippo, you have a wife and a son ! they are unhappy.'

" Then he gave me a letter from my wife, and disappeared. I came back alone to Lyons. The letter from my wife was filled with reproaches that touched me much less than the idea of my abandoned son. I saw from the letter that the business at Zara was going on fairly well . . . but to abandon my son ! The idea hurt me.

" All that evening I did not speak. Catherine remarked it, but she had such a good heart ! Three weeks went by without her asking me the reason of my sadness.

" ' I have a son,' I said, when she at last spoke.

" ' I guessed it,' she said to me. ' Let us go. I will be your servant at Zara.'

" ' Impossible. My wife knows everything. Look at her letter.'

" Catherine blushed very much at the insults my wife addressed to her, at the tone of scorn with which, without knowing her, my wife spoke of her. I embraced her, and did all I could to console her, but, sir, the three months I spent at Lyons after that fatal letter were hellish. I could not come to a decision.

" ' If I set off at once ! ' I said to myself one night, with Catherine sleeping by my side. As soon as the idea struck me, I felt a balm spreading through my soul. ' It must be an inspiration from God ! ' I said to myself. But then, as I looked at Catherine, I began to

say: 'What madness! I cannot do that.'

"So the grace of God abandoned me, and I fell back into my bitter sorrowful mood. Without knowing what I did, I began to dress quietly, my eyes always fixed on Catherine. All my wealth was hidden in the bed. There were five hundred francs in a desk, for a payment she had to pay for a debt in my absence. I took this money; I went to the coach-house where my cart was kept; I hired a horse, and set off.

"At every moment I turned my head. 'Catherine will follow me,' I said to myself. 'If I see her, I am lost.'

"To get a little peace, I took the coach two leagues from Lyons. In my trouble I arranged with a carter to take my cart to chambéry: I evidently had no need of it. I can't remember any more what determined my actions. I felt all the bitterness of my loss on reaching Chambéry. I went to a notary and made a deed of gift of all my property at Lyons to Madame Catherine Bonnard, my wife. I thought of her honour, and of the gossip of neighbours.

"After the notary was paid and I came outside with my deed, I felt I should never have the strength to write to Catherine. I returned to the notary: he wrote a letter to her in my name, and one of his clerks came to the post and sent the letter off in my presence. In a dark tavern, I also had a letter written to Bonnard in Valence. He was informed in my name of the deed of gift, that amounted at least to thirteen thousand francs. He was also told that his sister was lying very ill at Lyons, and was expecting him. I sent this letter off myself. Never since have I heard anything of them.

"I found my cart at the foot of Mont Cenis. I cannot recall why I stuck to this vehicle, which was the immediate cause of my misfortunes. The true cause was no doubt some terrible curse that Catherine launched against me. Lively and passionate as she was, young (she was then just twenty), beautiful, innocent, for she had had no weakness except for me whom she wished to serve and honour as her husband, her voice probably reached to God in a prayer for my severe punishment.

"I bought a passport and a horse. I do not know how I stopped to think at the foot of Mont Cenis that there was a frontier there. I had an idea of doing a little smuggling with my five hundred francs. I bought some watches, which I concealed. Passing proudly before the custom-house officers, I was called to stop. Having done so much smuggling in my life, I carried my head high. The custom-house men went straight to my hiding-place in the cart: probably I had been betrayed by the watchmakers. They took my watches, and fined me besides a hundred crowns. I gave them fifty francs; they let me go.

"This misfortune shook me up. In a moment I was reduced

from five hundred francs to a hundred francs. I could sell the horse and the cart, but it was a long way from Mont Cenis to Zara. As I was tormented by these sinister thoughts, a custom-house man ran up to me crying :

" ' Dog of a Jew, you must give me twenty francs ! The others have tricked me, and given me five francs instead of ten, and I have had all the trouble of catching up to you.'

" It was almost dark ; the man was drunk ; and he insulted me, and seized me by the collar. Satan tempted me, and I stabbed him with my knife, and flung him into the torrent twenty feet below the road. It was the first crime of my life, and I said to myself, ' I am done for ! '

" Nearing Suze, I heard a noise behind me. I put my horse at the gallop. He got his head, and I was not able to hold him back : the cart upset, and I broke my leg.

" ' Catherine has cursed me,' I thought. ' Heaven is just. I shall be recognised and hanged in two months.'

" But, as you see, nothing of the sort happened."